



AUSTRALIAN PHARMACY EXAMINING COUNCIL INC.

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SUBMISSION BY AUSTRALIAN PHARMACY EXAMINING COUNCIL INC

ON

REVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S CURRENT SYSTEM OF ASSESSING THE SKILLS OF PEOPLE WISHING TO MIGRATE TO AUSTRALIA UNDER THE SKILLED MIGRATION SYSTEM

Background Information

As in most countries, the practise of a profession in Australia requires evidence of an appropriate level of education and experience. Pharmacy education differs around the world both in quality and training and pharmacy delivery varies enormously in different countries. The practise of pharmacy in Australia in health care is unique and practising pharmacists in Australia must be competent at the level the Australian community expects.

The Australian Pharmacy Examining Council Inc (APEC) was established to assist overseas trained pharmacists to obtain registration in Australia and thus enable them to practise their profession in Australia. APEC comprises members from each Australian state and territory registering authority and in conjunction with the registering authorities has devised an examination procedure to assess the competence of overseas trained pharmacists. This examination process consists of an English test, a Stage I Examination (multiple choice), a period of supervised practice and a Stage II Examination (clinical).

The APEC examination process tests the competency of the applicant to practise contemporary pharmacy in Australia and there are very few applicants who are not eligible to enter the APEC examination process. Once eligible the applicant must demonstrate their theoretical and clinical knowledge of pharmacy and be tested at the level of an Australian pharmacist. This is seen to be a fair and equitable process and therefore APEC has very few issues of non-recognition of overseas trained pharmacists.

Under current reciprocal arrangements with Ireland, the United Kingdom and New Zealand pharmacists who trained in those countries and are registered to practise in those countries are not required to complete the APEC examination process, but are required to undertake a period of supervised practice in Australia (usually 4 weeks) and to be familiar with Australian drug laws.

In July 1999 APEC was listed as the skills assessing authority for hospital and retail pharmacists under the Migration Act and pharmacy is currently a profession which is listed on the Migration Occupation in Demand List (MODL).

Since 1981 over 600 overseas trained pharmacists have completed the APEC process and have been registered to practise pharmacy in Australia and many are in full time work in community, hospital or industry practice.

Specific points for comment

Comparison of Australian recognition processes with other immigration countries

The United States, Canada and New Zealand require a similar level of competence to practise pharmacy and have adopted a similar recognition process to APEC, although not identical.

Pharmacy graduates from the United Kingdom and Ireland are currently eligible to apply for registration in Australia under reciprocal arrangements. However, the United Kingdom has recently indicated its intention to withdraw from this arrangement.

It is intended that from July 2006 graduates from the United Kingdom and Ireland will take part in a modified recognition process which is currently being developed by APEC. Notwithstanding, some current state legislation will still allow reciprocity until such arrangements are removed from State Pharmacy Acts.

Processes

- *Communication of processes to users*

APEC regularly updates its website and publication "Candidates Information Handbook" (copy enclosed) and clearly articulates the process in all correspondence.

- *Efficiency of processes and elimination of barriers*

APEC continually monitors the efficiency of its operations and regularly consults users to identify issues. A survey was recently conducted amongst applicants and preceptors for feedback and implementation of any appropriate modifications to the process.

A review is currently taking place by which a "shortened" process will be introduced in July 2006 which will allow holders of qualifications from countries which systems have been accredited by the Australian accreditation body to move through the process quicker.

- *Early identification and response to persons needing skills upgrading*

Mandatory counseling forms an integral part of the APEC process when areas of weakness are identified.

- *Awareness and acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers*

The profile of APEC is high within the Australian pharmacy community, both at registration and professional levels and representatives from pharmacy organisations are members of the Council. There is a high employment rate amongst those successful in the APEC process with many candidates owning their own pharmacy business after becoming registered to practise pharmacy.

- *Achieving greater consistency in recognition of qualifications for occupational licensing by state and territory regulators*

APEC is the only process accepted by all pharmacy registering authorities and is consistent across Australia.

- *Alternative approaches to skills assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications*

APEC is unable to comment